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## **Modern Language Study in Great Britain.\***

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That ignorance of language is a serious obstacle to the development of foreign trade, and especially that ignorance of enemy peoples and their languages has hampered Great Britain's war efforts, are important conclusions reached by a committee of distinguished men appointed in August, 1916, by Mr. Asquith, then prime minister of Great Britain, to inquire into the position of modern languages in the educational system of the nation.

The report of the committee, recently made public, is exhaustive and well-considered. It gives first place to French in the history of modern civilization, though the literature of England may have exceeded that of France, and Germany may have excelled in the actual bulk and volume of scientific work during recent years. For Englishmen, German is rated in practical value as second only to French, and on the strictly commercial side German is probably superior.

The chairman of the committee was Stanley Leathers, civil service commissioner and one of the editors of Cambridge Modern History. Among the other members were Sir Maurice de Bunsen, British ambassador at Vienna when war was declared; Dr. H. A. L. Fisher, who was a member of the Government committee on German outrages and who resigned his place on the modern language committee to become president of the board of education; Dr. Walter Leaf, the banker and a translator of Homer; and Sir James Yoxall, who at one time was the royal commissioner on secondary education.

The report discusses such topics as the history of the study of modern languages in Great Britain; the neglect of modern studies; the value of modern studies; the relative importance of the several languages; the means of instruction; the supply and training of teachers for schools; the method of instruction; and ends with a summary of conclusions and recommendations. It is a safe prediction that this report will be esteemed as a valuable contribution to the discussion of the place in present-day education of modern language study. It deserves the careful study of the educators of this country as they approach problems of educational reconstruction and readjustment. The following excerpts from the report are of special interest:

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\* This article reprinted from No. 7 of "School Life", published by the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, contains literal excerpts from the report of the committee appointed to inquire into the position of modern languages in the educational system of Great Britain. It will serve our readers as a supplement to the article in the November issue of the Monatshefte. (The editor.)

The evidence collected by us seemed conclusive as to the need of foreign languages in business, especially under the new conditions which may be expected to prevail after the war. Keen emulation will then be encountered; lost ground must be recovered; new openings must be found; in countries where we felt secure we shall find our footing precarious. So large is the part of our industrial product marketed abroad, so great is our capital invested in foreign countries, so universal was our carrying trade, so extensive are our financial transactions and influence and the power of our credit, that any impediment to our success will react not only on those firms directly interested in foreign markets, but also on the prosperity of the whole country. Our foreign trade does not comprise the whole of our activities, but the whole of our activities depend upon it. In a great part of our foreign trade a knowledge of languages, a knowledge of foreign countries and of foreign peoples, will be directly and abundantly remunerative.

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No country can afford to rely on its domestic stores of knowledge. The whole civilized world is a co-operative manufactory of knowledge. In science, technical and pure, in history, antiquities, law, politics, economics, philosophy, new researches are constantly leading to new discoveries, new and fruitful ideas are giving new pointers to thought, new applications of old principles are being made, old stores are being rearranged, classified, and made available for new purposes. In this work all the civilized countries of the world collaborate, and in no branch of knowledge, abstract or concrete, disinterested or applied to the uses of man, can the specialist neglect the work of foreign students. To obtain access to these sources of knowledge some languages are more useful than others, but many have at least a limited utility. The knowledge contributed by foreigners to the common store is useful to commerce and industry, but most of all it is needed in the universities which have all learning for their province.

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The war has made this people conscious of its ignorance of foreign countries and their peoples. A democratic government requires an instructed people, and for the first time this people is desirous of instruction. Such instruction can not in the nature of things be universal; it must proceed from the more instructed to the more ignorant. It can not be said that before the war knowledge of foreign countries and their peoples was sufficient in ministers, politicians, journalists, civil servants, university professors, schoolmasters, men of business, or in any class of those whose function it is to instruct or guide the public. Further, those few who had important knowledge to impart found no well-informed and in-

terested public to take up and spread this information. Thus the masses and the classes alike were ignorant to the point of public danger.

Ignorance of the mental attitude and aspirations of the German people may not have been the cause of the war; it certainly prevented due preparation and hampered our efforts after the war had begun; it still darkens our counsels. Similar ignorance of France, greater ignorance of Italy, abysmal ignorance of Russia have impeded the effective prosecution of the war, and will impede friendly and co-operative action after the war is over. We need a higher level of instruction in those whose duty it is to enlighten us; we need a far greater public, well informed and eager to understand; we need in all some interpenetration of knowledge and insight. The gradual dissipation of national ignorance is the greatest aim of modern studies. They can only work through the few to the many, through the many to the multitude. But neither the higher instruction of the few, nor the broader instruction of the many, nor the dissemination of sound views in the multitude, can be safely neglected in a democratic country. In this field modern studies are not a mere source of profit, not only a means of obtaining knowledge, nor an instrument of culture; they are a national necessity.

For the acquisition of sound knowledge of any foreign country a speaking knowledge of the language is the first necessity. Hundreds of thousands of British citizens traveled in France before the war; but only a minimal percentage got any knowledge of the French people, because the others could not converse with the inhabitants in their own language. Of those who knew the language only a fraction had the historical and literary knowledge and the general enlightenment to make the best use of foreign travel and residence. Here also many must be instructed in order that a few may make good. Speaking is indispensable for this purpose, but reading is also necessary.

Much may be learned about foreign countries by studying their literature and their newspapers from works of history, and other stores of information. For what foreign country have we encyclopaedic handbooks of its art, its institutions, its biography, its geography, its philosophy, such as we possess for Greece and Rome? For France, Germany, Italy, Russia we need a series of works, dealing with their history in the fullest and widest sense, not less complete, reliable, and exhaustive, than the treatises that have been compiled for Greece and Rome. The economic study alone of each of these and of many other countries would amply repay the nation that knew how to encourage and reward such studies. If modern studies are broadly conceived and duly honored and recompensed, the example of the classics shows that the work will be done.

The importance of any language may be judged by the significance

of its people in the development of modern civilization, by the intrinsic value of its literature, by its contribution to the valid learning of our times, and by its practical use in commercial and other national intercourse. French is by far the most important language in the history of modern civilization. France was ahead of Italy in the medieval revival of learning. The University of Paris was the chief source of light to Europe from the days of Abelard for three hundred years. Italy took the lead in that later revival which is known as the Renaissance, and when she fell a victim to the discordant political ambitions of foreign powers, of the Papacy, and of her own princelings, it was France who with her help carried on the great tradition.

The continued progress of France was never arrested by civil discord, by unlimited autocracy, or even by the convulsive crisis of her great Revolution. For three hundred years France was the acknowledged leader of Europe in the arts, sciences, and the fashions. In literature alone among the arts has she an equal or a superior in England. In the actual bulk and volume of her scientific work France may, during the last half century, have fallen behind Germany, but by vivifying and pregnant ideas she has made the whole world her debtor, and in the lucidity and logical consistency of her interpretation of life she has no rival.

We are her debtors above all other peoples, for England was during four centuries the pupil, and afterward the enemy and rival, but always in some degree under the influence of France. Even for practical purposes the great majority of our witnesses give French the first place. Not only is French the language of diplomatic intercourse, but in countries where English has not established itself, French is found most commonly useful as an intermediary between any two persons of different nationality. Physical propinquity also gives French a special value for Englishmen; and recent calamities confronted and endured together should create an eternal bond of sympathy between the two nations.

Fundamental diversity of character and temperament render mutual comprehension difficult, but once established it should serve to correct some of our national defects. In mere matter of language, as in other things, the two nations seem destined to serve as complementary one to the other. Our careless articulation may be corrected by the precise and studied utterance of the French, our modes of written expression might gain much from study of the perspicuous phrasing, local construction, and harmonious proportions of their prose. From every point of view French is, for us, above all, the most important of living tongues; it has, and it should retain, the first place in our schools and universities.

Before the war German was, perhaps, the first language from the point of view of information. Its preeminence was attained somewhat

rapidly—in the course of the nineteenth century, and especially in the last 40 years. In philosophy and in those sciences and quasi-sciences in which new knowledge is constantly acquired and general conceptions undergo frequent modifications, no student who wished to keep abreast of the times could afford to ignore German publications. This position was strengthened by the industry and competence of German translators. Important works of learning and literature, produced in languages not generally known, such as Dutch and Russian, were often accessible only in German translations. The German supremacy was skillfully fostered by the admirably organized German book trade and extended not only to the natural sciences, but to the whole field of philology and antiquities and, to a large part, of history.

From the practical point of view German was second in value to French alone, and on the strictly commercial side probably equal, or even superior, to it owing to the wide extension of German activity and the general use of German in the business of Russia and the Balkan Peninsula. Thus far there is no room for difference of opinion. The further questions that naturally arise as to the real measure of civilization's debt to Germany and the comparative value of her literature we do not propose to discuss. The time is hardly propitious for their dispassionate consideration.

No doubt as a factor of the first magnitude in shaping the destiny of Europe during the last hundred years Germany must retain a permanent and compelling interest to the historical student, though the estimate of the causes which have raised her to that position may undergo changes in the opinion of succeeding generations. And on this, also, there will be general agreement. After the war the importance of Germany must correspond with the importance of Germany. If Germany after the war is still enterprising, industrious, highly organized, formidable no less in trade than in arms, we can not afford to neglect her or ignore her for a moment; we can not leave any of her activities unstudied. The knowledge of Germany by specialists will not suffice; it must be widespread throughout the people. A democracy can not afford to be ignorant.

We may indicate one point in particular which is likely to be of importance at the end of the war. It will in any case be impossible to oust the use of German in commerce, even for our own purposes at home, apart from any question of competition in neutral countries. The mere settlement of pre-war accounts with Germany will be a long and difficult matter. If we are not ourselves able to supply men who have sufficient knowledge of German to conduct the necessary correspondence, strong incentive will be offered to revert to the old practice of employing qualified German clerks for the purpose.

This is only one of many considerations which lead us to the conclusion that it is of essential importance to the Nation that the study of the German language should be not only maintained, but extended. Unfortunately, the problem may not prove to be so simple as it seems. Is it certain that after the war public opinion will at once be ready to give an improved position to German in schools? Yet wisdom and prudence demand that its position should be improved, for during the early part of this century the study of German was not going forward, but backward.

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### Reading.

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It is a generally recognized fact among modern language teachers that the discussion of methods of teaching reading touches the heart of our whole problem. Whatever we may wish to do in the way of laying a foundation for a later speaking knowledge, whatever general grammar instinct we may wish to develop, whatever habits we may wish to teach: it is with the development of at least a moderate ability to read the language that the vast majority of teachers have chiefly to do. For this reason no scattering of effort that will detract from success in teaching reading ability must be permitted. Real reading means, of course, the comprehending of the sense of a text without the mediation of translation, dictionary work, analysis or parsing. This is our aim. In whatever work we do, let us keep this ideal clearly before us. To arrive at this goal, however, in the brief time usually at our disposal, makes imperative the skilful use of all the above-mentioned tools. The first work with reading texts is usually in the nature of practice in the use of these tools, and this is justifiable. But the sin of most of our teaching has been that, in a two-year course especially, no effort has been made to get beyond the mere practice phase, and really *read* something with only the thought of content in mind. It is so hard for us to let go of the idea of *absolute thoroughness* and not to catch our breath hard at the thought of passing a word, much less a whole sentence without knowing its innermost shades of meaning! But do we do this in reading English? How many of us enjoy reading Dickens, for instance, or Scott, or Shakespeare, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Poe, or Longfellow, without in the least being able to define every word and diagram every sentence. To use another illustration, if our vehicle moves so slowly as to sound every depression in the road, the pleasure of the ride is spoiled. "Hitting the high places" is a piece of homely slang that every language teacher needs to keep in mind. Along with the thorough, slow, painstaking work that must be kept up regularly,

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\* On leave 1918-19 in United States Civil Service.